JOHN CHIN YOUNG

THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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(1909 -)

John Young, internationally known artist and art collector, was born in Honolulu and graduated from McKinley High School. A self-taught artist and art collector of international status, Mr. Young tells of his upbringing in a close-knit Chinese family and the influence of the Chinese culture on his work.

He describes many influences resulting from his travels as both an artist and a collector. Mr. Young explains how these experiences, ranging from the Great Wall of China to the Lido in Venice, have contributed to the eclectic nature of his work.

The diversified jobs that sustained him during his early years and his camouflage work during World War II are recalled. In spite of his extensive travels, Mr. Young has chosen to maintain his home in Hawaii because of his deep love for the Islands.

INTERVIEW WITH JOHN CHIN YOUNG

In the studio of his Poka Place home, Honolulu, Hawaii

April 10, 1986

Y: John C. Young

S: Alice Sinesky, Interviewer

Y: Let's see now. My father's name was Young Hin. He came to the Island when he was a young man, in the teen years, sixteen or seventeen years of age. He came as sort of an apprentice, and my mother came when she was very young, around eight or nine years old, worked in the A. B. Lau family and was adopted later by the Lau family.

My father met my mother when they were in their late teens and they got married like the old Chinese, but they got introduced by her family. That's how they met. From that marriage they had seven children--I'm one of them--I'm number six. We had four brothers and three sisters. Now my eldest brother is J. T. Young, the second is J. K., the third is J. L., and then my sisters came into the picture as Gladys, Florence, then myself and then my youngest sister Margaret.

All the children were brought up in a very nice fashion --in the Chinese fashion, that is, a Chinese culture. Actually, they came from a village in China outside Macau and they brought with them the Chinese culture.

S: Both of your parents came from the same area, but met here?

Y: Yes, from the same village and they met in the Islands here. They brought along the Chinese culture, which means how the Chinese believe in bringing up their children, their livelihood. They were brought up in the Chinese way of life. They believed in Buddhism. My mother and father were Buddhists, and we were brought up in this atmosphere of the Buddhist religion. However, in the later years, of course, most of our family--the kids--became Christians and joined a Christian church, which I did. My mother and father always talked about Buddhist ways of life, so that we knew something about Buddhist history along with our Christian bringing up, too. We were brought up in that fashion--in the fashion where we were brought up like the Chinese--the family was a very close-knit family. We were not that wealthy, but enough

to survive in a family. My father was a merchant and he was working to provide for a family of seven. It was hard for him, I'm sure.

Even then my older brothers were able to go to college and my younger sister went to college, too. Out of the whole family of seven just my brother, one of them went to college, the third brother, and my youngest sister went to college and that's it. I didn't go to college because I was interested in my field as a painter. Even though at the time I would like to have gone to college, it was partly financial and partly because I was not able to go to the University of Hawaii because I didn't make the grade. (laughs)

Going to high school in those days, that was my training in high school. Going back to an early age when I was very young, say about six or seven years old, I was more or less already interested in the arts and I wanted to be a painter and that's all I could think about. I remember during the days when I was out of school, say during the summer vacation, I spent the whole vacation just doing one work of art instead of going out like any other kids and having a great time. I would more or less work around my paintings and this would give me great pleasure.

S: Did your family encourage this? How did your parents feel about it?

Y: Well, my father didn't think that, most Chinese families don't think that being a painter will be the nth degree of livelihood. It's a big struggle. Of course, all families look to see the kids are well taken care of in their later years, that they will make a living, not starving, right? Knowing the fact that I wanted to be a painter, naturally he was not in favor of it, because he thought that being a painter would be really hard work and a hard living and I would not be able to survive. Instead, he advised me to be a merchant or a secretary or something like that.

S: Something practical.

Y: Something practical, that's what the Chinese want, practical. However, my mother was a little bit more conducive to the idea that I wanted to be a painter. She said, "Well, if you want to be..." She encouraged me. When I first registered at McKinley High School I thought I wanted to go in the art field, and I got myself involved with mechanical drawing and that was wrong for me. And drafting, and that was not what I wanted. This was about 1929 and their program was very limited. They didn't have what they have today.

There're more programs being established. In the early days we only had preliminary drawing, basic drawing, pencil,

charcoal and some watercolor. Nothing in oils or acrylics or things like that. However, we learned some basic ideas from those classes and it was a good thing that I had some of that basic drawing and ideas from those teachers. After I finished McKinley High School, I started the business. I tried to start a business making a living at being a painter. In order to be a painter, I had to do many things like being a sign writer and posters, and the best time of the year was the holiday season, Christmas time, when you could go ahead and do all of those signs, the window signs, with Santa Claus and reindeers and stuff like that, and I was able to make a living for myself for the time being.

S: I read somewhere that you had gone to a Chinese school and that the calligraphy had played an important part, it was an influence on your work later on.

Y: That's true, because during the time I was in the language school we were taught not only Chinese history and all that, but we were also taught to write calligraphy with a brush. That, in the end, was very helpful to me because calligraphy is an art in itself, it's an art form to be able to use the brush correctly. Writing Chinese calligraphy is an art in itself. In later years in being a painter, I felt that the calligraphy itself is almost like an abstract painting. That started me to do my painting in abstract forms, and I liked the fluid line of using the brush and being able to go ahead and create a lot of images with the brush and writing calligraphy. I felt that did a lot for me in my later works and what I'm doing today.

S: So this going to the Chinese school, was this something your parents encouraged or insisted upon? Did all your family members do this?

Y: The entire family had to go to school except maybe one or two persons, but we were the younger ones and they wanted us to have a good formal education and learn something about our Chinese background. I do not regret that even though it was difficult going to two schools, to English school and also going to Chinese school in the afternoon; and that is a long time going to school, and homework and little time for relaxation or socializing. But in going to Chinese school, you learn about your own roots, your culture, writing, calligraphy. That was helpful even today when I go back to the Orient, to be able to speak Chinese.

S: Did you have any time to yourself? Now you were busy going to two schools. Did you have any time during the summer? Did you work part-time or what did you do then?

Y: The summers were when I had to make a living, so I became a door-to-door salesman selling all kinds of cloth, stockings, shoes, whatnot, clothing, and you meet up with all

kinds of people. You knock on the door, "How are you?" and then you make a sale and that's how one can survive by making a living during the summer months, so you can go ahead and continue with your work when school begins.

S: If I know Chinese parents, they encourage you to work all the time at something.

Y: I think that it was not only from the standpoint that I was able to make some money to support myself, I think it was good for me, for anybody else for that matter, to get out and meet the public and mingle with the public, and get yourself forward and learn to speak the language better, and to explain. I think you better yourself in many ways by being a house-to-house salesman. I do not regret that. It was a wonderful time to have that experience. It's been most helpful to me. I used to be shy, and after that maybe not quite so shy.

S: So you were doing posters and you were doing decorations and you were doing all kinds of things. Was this prior to your opening your gallery or at the same time, or what was the time frame here?

Y: Doing the signs like that was during the time that I first opened the gallery [originally Beaux Arts] on Nuuanu Street. The rent was just fifty dollars, but fifty dollars at the time was pretty high. In order to make fifty dollars, you have to do all kinds of window signs and so on and the pay is not much, but you're glad you've got enough money to pay your rent.

S: Was this during the Depression years?

Y: Almost during the time of the Depression. I remember so well at the time when I was in the gallery, I had only a dime in my pocket and I was thinking about--after a cup of coffee and a doughnut--was wondering what would be my next move; whether I should continue being a painter or just be realistic and get back to the basic way of life. Very fortunately, at that time when I needed some encouragement, here Mrs. Wilcox from Kauai came into the gallery. Of all places, she came into the gallery, saw two of my seascape paintings on the easels and asked who did them. I said, "I did." "How much?" "Seventy-five dollars apiece." "Well," she said, "I'll buy both of them." That was truly a great encouragement and a wonderful boost to be able to go ahead and think maybe, after all, other people like them, too.

S: Right, because even if you have this desire or need as a painter to express yourself, it's really helpful from both the morale and the financial standpoint to have somebody else come along and encourage you.

Y: Oh, yes. Everyone needs that kind of support and morale building up. Everyone needs, no matter what kind of work you're doing, you need that kind of support, admiration and encouragement, because I don't think any one can honestly say, "Oh, I know what I'm doing," and keep on working without the kind of acknowledging public to go ahead and give them the encouragement that they need. By that I mean, encouragement in the way of supporting him in buying his works, so that the artist himself can go ahead and continue what he's doing. Even today I feel that all young artists need that kind of support, no matter what they say. I think it's wonderful that a person can go ahead and give to that young artist a chance to believe in themselves, that they can do it.

S: Would you consider Mrs. Wilcox...was she your mentor would you say, or was this a one-time purchase or did it lead to other things?

Y: Mrs. Wilcox was just like an angel, I think. I always remember that when I'd see her. She came at the right moment, the right timing when I needed so much encouragement and support and the funds to continue. It was only a one-shot deal, but it was an important time and I think that she was an art lover. I'm sure, otherwise she wouldn't have walked in, and then in her heart perhaps she thinks it's the right thing to do, to buy the paintings and help the poor struggling artist. That I could see in her.

S: What was the next step after that?

Y: Well, I made some money and that was encouraging. Then I started to work more and more and was able to go ahead and have a thousand dollars in my pocket. At that time, a thousand dollars was like ten thousand dollars, maybe. I decided to close the gallery and take this adventurous trip to China, my roots, go back to Hong Kong and to the village.

Well, anyway with a thousand dollars I went back to the Orient. I had all my canvasses ready, so with an open heart and great spirit, and even though I went steerage next to the propeller, and every time the propeller would be chunking away it would shake you up. By the time you get to Hong Kong you're all shaken up already, but it doesn't matter because it's more important that you're there, and you have this wonderful adventure ahead of you.

S: When you're young, things like that don't bother you. Not when you're that age.

Y: No, it doesn't matter. I remember checking into the YMCA; at that time it was probably two dollars a night. As long as I had a roof over my head and a little food, that's all one needs. The food comes from your creativity to be

able to go ahead and get the canvas out and start painting. I remember the time when I met a coolie and he was all ragged and with his little bamboo I thought he made a good subject for painting, so I asked him to pose. He said, "No." He was too busy; he had to make a living. I said, "All right, let me give you a couple of dollars," which was a lot for him. I took him back to the YMCA and they said, "What are you doing with this coolie?" "Oh, don't worry, I'm just going to paint him." I took him upstairs to this eight by eight room and I recall you could hardly walk around after you put the canvas up and he sat there, you know, and I started painting him, and I felt so good about it, doing a person and the feeling, the idea of Hong Kong and this is China.

I did a lot of paintings after that and went back to Peking and the Great Wall of China. The Great Wall of China, of course, was one of the wonders of the world, and can you imagine being up there alone and setting your easel up and start painting away? You get this great enthusiasm to put the oil on the canvas and try to relate to the wall that has been there for so many years. You get the history back of you, you know. While you're painting it, the rain came and it doesn't matter because you're so excited about the painting you just keep on painting with water and paint. They don't mix, so it's okay, you start sort of a new kind of medium. (laughs)

And then came home with all the canvasses, the Great Wall of China, the Temple of Heaven and other important sights in Peking. I was interested in people at the time, not only the coolies and the junks. The people themselves were down to earth. I find that kind of excitement to paint the way of life, how they lived.

S: Did you get to see any of your relatives, your family, while you were on that trip?

Y: Yes, I did. That was a very good trip because I went back to the village and met some of the old relatives on my father's side, went back to the house were he lived, went back to the central hall where all the people gathered. In fact, I was part of that, a farmer, and started beating the husks out of the rice and had that wonderful feeling out in the open sun. Here you are in the village doing what these people have been doing all these years. It was...you bring back the time. I enjoyed that visit so much, being part of the scene.

S: At that point you were very, very glad you had gone to the Chinese school.

Y: Yes, being able to speak Chinese. Otherwise, can you imagine just mumbling around and not knowing what they're saying? They don't know what you're saying. It's a very

good thing one can relate. I think language is important to go ahead and relate to one another. There's a language barrier if you don't speak the language. I was very glad that I did go to language school.

S: The fact that you could speak the language helped you on sightseeing and exploring the shops. You started collecting in a small way on that trip, didn't you?

Y: Oh, at that time being young, you go ahead and poke your nose into everything that's excitable, and for me at that point, it was exciting to see the different exhibitions there, and the different galleries had wonderful things and wonderful objects of art. I was in Peking and I had so little money and there were so many wonderful things in the shops. Fortunately, at that time the prices were not very expensive, so one could go ahead and obtain many, many things if they had the funds to buy. It's not a question of the amount of money that you have or whatever it is, and I only had enough money to buy the few things that I had. Here I saw a pair of fresco paintings that were done way back in the Tang dynasty in one of the small shops. Incredible, they have this small shop with so many treasures around, laying here and there, on the wall or on the floor. Yet you discover it, and it's wonderful to discover something like that out of nowhere. Then you recognize it and you're able to make the contact point, to be able to talk to the owner of the object, and get them to release it to you with little money. You feel that you have gained something in a sense of finding this treasure. It's a treasure for myself, regardless of whether it's a treasure for another person. That's not important. It's a treasure to me.

You bring it home and it becomes a part of your life. You enjoy it, you remember it. The things that I have gathered throughout the years in other countries have become a diary for me, and I remember each piece, how I obtained it, the people I talked to, the previous owners, how they obtained it. You begin to learn a lot just by conversing with them. My education in the archaeological field is very limited. I never did go to college and study about archaeology. My contact is only through visual contact and meeting people who own them, and to have the good fortune even handling some of them myself.

S: So it's important to you to have...well, not to just acquire these things, but the travelling and the contacts that were involved in acquiring them.

Y: That's the most important part in the adventure, going to the collector's home and meeting the collector himself. Just like a new friend that you haven't met. You finally meet them and they speak the same language and you learn from them a lot of things that you do not learn from books.

Sharing their personal collection with amazement and how much they revere the pieces that they've had these years, and listen to the talk and the experiences. I think one gains a great deal of experience that you cannot be taught in books.

S: I was curious what you did with all these paintings that you brought back from China. You said you went prepared with all these canvasses.

Y: Oh, when I came back, I had an exhibition at the Academy of Arts. It was my first big one-man show after my trip to the Orient. I had an exhibition at the Academy of Arts, and it was a successful show and I had some recognition. People began to enjoy my work and began to buy my paintings, and one thing led to another. I had exhibitions from then on at the museums, the Los Angeles Museum, the San Francisco Museum, de Young, Santa Barbara Museum, the Legion of Honor, the Corcoran Gallery. These are one-man shows I've had throughout the years. Then I had some private galleries like Gump's in San Francisco and Dalzell Hatfield in Los Angeles and some private galleries.

That, of course, was very productive for me. I was able to make many contacts and good reviews and so on and have many shows at the Academy of Arts, and different kinds of exhibitions like the big show that I had in 1977 that took up about seventy-six paintings upstairs. It represented the kind of work that I'd been doing, mostly abstract painting.

Of course, that was one part of my life, doing abstract painting, but in earlier years I had done different things. I had started to paint the sea, which I loved very much, in my early years as a painter.

S: I had read one review, and I think this must have made you feel very good. Someone gave a rave review and said that while you experimented, you never fumbled.

Y: Yes, that was a writer by the name of Mr. Frankenstein [critic Alfred V. Frankenstein] with the San Francisco Chronicle, and he favored me very much at that time and said I was a Sung painter. "The brush, the subtlety of colors, and the use of the colors and the use of brush strokes were almost like a Sung painter." A Sung dynasty painter. That was a compliment which I thought was very generous of him to say.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 1

Y: I did a lecture which was recorded at the Academy of Arts of my paintings.

S: Oh, was that the Spectrum?

Y: Spectrum was one that was done recently. This was in 1977 when I had this big show at the Academy. One night they wanted me to give a lecture on my paintings, which I did. We photographed the paintings, and then I talked about each painting from slides.

S: Well, you wanted to talk about--we talked about your trip to the Orient--but you wanted to talk about some other trips.

Y: I wanted to talk about trips to other parts of the world where I got certain kinds of inspiration. This was in my early years. We didn't talk about my middle time.

S: I'll be glad to come back a second time. (laughter)

Y: I'll bore you to death.

S: No, no. We covered your first very successful show at the Academy, and you told a little bit about the various exhibits and where they were. Would you like to talk about...you spent quite a bit of time in Paris, right?

Y: Yes. In fact, I went to Paris in 1959 for the first time, but to get back before Paris, right after the war in 1946 was my first trip to the mainland and to San Francisco and that area. I took my car, and from San Francisco I drove down to Mexico City, and I was taken by the crafts, of course, and by the Mexicans--what they'd been doing with their crafts, and their huaraches, and their jewelry, glassblowing and textiles. I collected some of those things just because I was interested.

Again I brought my canvasses along and I started painting the Mexican scene. At that time the Mexicans were doing their own kind of thing, and in some measure I think I was more or less carried away and influenced by some of the Mexican painters like Orozco and Siqueiros and Tamayo and other artists at that early age, 1946. I did some of those Mexican landdscapes and of the Mexican people themselves.

Anyway, getting back to collecting things. I was in the Bellas Artes, which is the museum in Mexico City and, lo and behold, I saw this wonderful exhibition of pre-Columbian art and I was taken by that type of work and the collection at large which dates back over a thousand years. I was amazed at seeing these wonderful figures in clay and stone and jewelry and gold, and all that hit me and I was very much taken by their work. I started collecting these pre-Columbian art pieces and I was carried away and just two words "Ay idolo?"--"Do you have any idols?"--in the Spanish language, the only two words I know. In the car I went from

village to another village and asked, "Ay idolo?" As a result, I got a number of pieces, some fragments and some insignificant pieces, but that's all right, I like them.

I started collecting one thing after another. By the time I had been there for six months, my neighbor, who knew I was interested in pre-Colubian art, said, "Come and take a look at mine." I looked at his collection and said, "Great. Come and see what I've been doing." He was amazed to see what I'd been doing in six months in collecting pre-Columbian works of art and bringing them back home to Honolulu. That was the beginning of collecting primitive art from Mexico City.

From Mexico City to Guatemala and up to as far as Peru collecting works from Incas and so on. I brought these things back and they became a part of my collection and I was very fortunate to have them. That was the time of Mexican art. Later I branched out into the field of primitive art in Africa and New Guinea. I was in Paris, I took a trip there, and I was very excited about seeing the Louvre and all those important museums, the Louvre, the Guimet Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, and was very much taken by what they'd been doing. At the same time I saw some great African works of art which they had in the galleries and I started collecting that also, some African art, New Guinea works of art and Oceanic. It all came through the picture of primitive art.

S: Where did you make these purchases?

Y: In the galleries, because that's where you find them and from some private collections. I was excited about getting all this primitive art and bringing them home. Because as part of the overall, we're talking about primitive art from pre-Columbian to art in Africa, New Guinea, from the early Solomon Islands, New Hebrides, all the Melanesian and Polynesian countries.

I gained a lot of knowledge from them. You learn about them. What culture, where they're from, just because you're interested in these things, you naturally would have reflections on where they're from. You want to know where they come from, who made them, what tribes and how, the reasons for their making them. You learn because you are interested in collecting those primitive art forms.

S: You made your first trip to the mainland after the war about 1946.

Y: Yes, and after that I continued, I went back and forth to Mexico City, I made more than thirty-five trips. I went back and forth making more connections amd more collecting and more painting and so on.

S: When was the first trip to Paris?

Y: The first trip was in 1959. At the time I'd never been to Paris, and imagine, the Arc de Triomphe and Notre Dame. That was exciting. I learned some French language; you learn it because you have to. I had to learn it because back in 1959 I had gone into the Atelier--you know, where they do lithographs--and in order to get your ideas across, you have to speak a little French because all those Frenchmen speak nothing but French. They don't understand what you're saying in English. You force yourself to learn and get yourself across, your ideas about what you want them to do for you. Because of that, I was able to do a lot of lithographs.

So 1959 was the first year and I went back in 1960 and spent about six months at a time. I was in the Atelier d'Joubet and did numerous lithographs. I learned the technique of doing a lithograph and some etchings and so on, and came home with a whole series of lithographs that I enjoyed doing. That was part of my art work.

S: While you were in Europe, did you travel to other areas besides Paris?

Y: Oh, I travelled all over. To England, Paris, to Spain. I was excited about their culture, the flamenco music, the flamenco dancers. Like going to a small cabaret and you feel the dancers themselves, in a small room that holds not more than fifty guests, and the hand clapping and the stamping of the feet is so exciting. And I would take along, as you know, every time I travel I bring along a sketch pad, and you just get the feeling of the dancers, and when you start sketching, you almost become a part of the dancers themselves. In order to put it down on paper, I want to feel as though I am that flamenco dancer.

S: The energy surges...

Y: The energy comes through your whole body. You just cannot sit there and try to capture it. You want to be a part of it, you want to feel the movement, the music and all the excitement and all the movement of the dance. You've got to feel the way the dancer...you've got to be a part of it. That's the only way you can interpret it. That was a wonderful time.

S: Italy, too?

Y: Italy. Oh yes, I went to Venice to see the beautiful light. The light in Venice is something again. You sail from Venice across the Lido and all times of day the light changes. You know Turner the English painter [Joseph Turner 1775-1851] who paints the light in Venice, it's so well done

and I can understand what it was like because I was there. There is so much in Venice, not only the culture and the fine works of art and the plaza. Also, of course, in Rome and see the sculpture by Michelangelo and the Sistine Chapel. That all came about travelling through from one country to another by car, and you see all the different areas, the landscape. That is another part that is truly magnificent and a wonderful experience.

The south of France and the Provence area, and seeing where Cezanne used to paint or Van Gogh, and you recognize those cornfields and seeing a landscape that they had done. You come to relate to these things and you feel the wheatfields and all that.

S: So who needs college, if they can do all this? (laughs)

Y: Well, college gives you a different kind of education.

S: Yes, but there's nothing like that firsthand experience.

Y: I chose that because in the beginning I couldn't go.

S: As it turned out it didn't matter.

Y: Well, as it turned out it was fortunate for me that I was able to continue with what I liked to do best. I think in life a person should be blessed to do the thing that he wants to do. It's not like doing something that you don't want to do. Painting has always been my first love. I'm still doing it and I will continue to do it as long as I live. It becomes more creative. When a person's creative, his mind starts working all the time to do something on a bare canvas and see how it develops, and it's a very exciting time. It's exciting because you are creating.

Every time I work on a canvas, it's a new challenge. And each color that I put on or each shape that I put on it develops from that, and then it keeps on going and developing and suddenly by a certain point you find that the painting is something that you truly love. That is the wonderful satisfaction, not what you're going to get from the painting, but what you have accomplished on that canvas in order to create something that you truly enjoy yourself. I think it's more important to like it yourself to begin with.

First, you've got to do it because you like it, because you believe in yourself. That's important. Second, if the painting develops to be something that you truly like and enjoy doing, then it's double pleasure. The third part is that you find an audience who really likes it and that's the nth degree of satisfaction for every creative artist to have an audience who likes what you're doing. Up to this time in my life, well, I'm still painting and I enjoy what I'm

doing, and it gives me more time now to think about what to do next and that every day is a challenge and every new canvas is a new creative work that can be put on. It's just not an ordinary thing. You just keep on searching and finding new ideas. I think when one stops thinking and is satisfied with what he's doing, that's the end of it all. That's not what I want.

S: Well, I think most creative people have enough things going through their minds that they have projects lined up to keep them going for about the next hundred years.

Y: Yes, you keep on moving along with the times. Who would ever think in the early days when I started painting... it was very realistically done in the early years and that was a beginning. You learned the basic, you paint what you see. Then suddenly you started to develop your own style. You see new ideas and new things. You keep on working and every year it changes. There's no way I can see that a man can sit down in a studio and he's going to think and do the same thing over and over again. It's not growing. Actually, if he does that, there's not much more to be said. You're not creating anymore.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 2

July 8, 1986

S: You had mentioned something, in particular, about camouflage work.

Y: Yes, that was during the war years. Let's see, the war started in 1941, right?

S: For us.

Y: Yes, for us. I was at home at the time the Japanese bombers and planes were coming by on their way to Pearl Harbor and it was a Sunday morning.

S: Where was home at that time?

Y: On Bachelot Street. It was unusual that morning because we'd had practice firing and all kinds of things, but suddenly this sounded too real to be true. Sure enough, it was a war between the United States and Japan. The Japanese planes came over and I looked above, and the Japanese planes were above my rooftop and the war began.

Everything was moving around and exciting and everything else. The whole life-style changed quite a bit. I had the business called the Beaux Arts on Bethel Street and it was almost closed. There was almost no activity then. A month later I joined the United States Engineers Department at

Punahou School. During that time they had need for people in the camouflage section, so I participated in that field. Camouflaged during the nighttime, and you could hardly see anything because of the blackout. All Punahou School. It was a very interesting time.

We spent days afterwards designing the camouflage areas of airfields and tankers and all that.

S: This was for use worldwide? You did the design?

Y: Yes, we designed the netting (weaving), the nets to cover the bunkers, the camouflaging the buildings, the important buildings, the bridges, the airfields. We would more or less design all this, and then go out and inspect the sites either by plane or by automobile. Driving around all through the war years from one site to another to inspect all these things.

S: Was this just here in Honolulu?

Y: Yes, in Honolulu, but we would go out to the other Islands, too, for that matter. It was a time when we'd meet up with a lot of artists, themselves designing nets, and telling the lei sellers how to weave the different kinds of cloth that were dyed to resemble the earth and the surrounding areas, so that it would be camouflaged.

We'd fly up in a small plane, a two-seater, and inspect the fields and see that it was all right. Sometimes it was so good that we could hardly find the field. (laughs)

S: That meant you were doing a fantastic job.

Y: We were doing a good job and we were doing national work. We spent several years doing camouflage work. That was during the time where I gave up the business part. I still had some time to paint. But, literally, there was no business. I guess we spent about four years doing that. It was quite a time.

S: I think I remember reading about Paul Klee who during the first World War painted airplane wings for the Germans.

Y: Good heavens, they should have saved those. Did Paul Klee do the wings, really? (laughs)

S: Yes, yes.

Y: I didn't read that. Isn't that interesting? If Paul Klee had done all those wings, they should have kept all those wings. A loss for all of us.

Well, I didn't paint the wings. I did the designing. Some of the planes were painted, but we actually didn't do the painting. We designed the smokestacks. We didn't paint it, just designed it and marked the buildings with chalk; this section here is green, this section is brown, and more or less interweave a design pattern that is almost camouflage from the air.

S: That's interesting. I had never given too much thought to how that was done.

Y: Well, that was for four years and that was a different kind of life-style. Not much society, not much entertainment.

S: But you made up for it after World War II. (laughs)

Y: Of course. It gave us a little time. At that time, we weren't like the war artists who go out and paint. I was not assigned to that. I did have some time for myself to do some work of my own. It also gave me some hours and time, too, because on the inspections we would go to all the sites and go through all the tunnels and areas where no one could go in except military.

We had a chance to look at the landscape. That's one thing that was a benefit, because when you drive around, you can't help but see the landscape and that gave us ideas for painting.

S: We had talked a good bit about your development during the thirties and forties, and one thing I noticed was that we hadn't mentioned any particular influences or any other artist friends. Were there any particularly close friends during those times?

Y: Yes, during those times, during the war years and after the war years, there were many artists in Honolulu. The ones that I met were friends like Madge Tennent and Isami Doi. Then there's Shirley Russell, Juliette May Fraser, Juanita Vitousek, Joseph Feher and Hon-Chew Hee. We had a group, a small interesting group, where we'd meet and discuss art in general. It was a very good companionship, camaraderie, and I think it was very helpful and very exciting for all artists concerned.

S: You mentioned Juliette May Fraser. In writing a review of one of your shows, she gave you the ultimate compliment, that you were a "painter's painter." Now this praise from peers is always very important whether you're an artist or a ballplayer. How would you define an "artist's artist?" What would that mean to you?

Y: Well, as you said, it's a great compliment coming from Juliette May Fraser, and also from Madge Tennent, who has also written about me. I think it was very complimentary and very encouraging.

S: Yes, but how would you define it? What does it convey to you?

Y: It conveys to me that most artists would like to have that being said about themselves because you're not painting just commercially. You paint what the artists want you to paint. In other words, it's a compliment to the nth degree. What the artists want to be like.

S: We talked about how you need the audience and their appreciation, but above all it's, "To thine ownself be true." The commercial part would have to be secondary.

Y: Exactly. Unfortunately, in many cases, as you know, all throughout history, artists have to live and they can't say, "Well, we're going to stick to our painting and just live on what we can do." There was an old friend of mine, John Kelly, who died some time ago [1879-1962] and people asked him, "Why do you do all these posters and the menus for the Royal Hawaiian Hotel and things like that?" "Unfortunately, I love to eat. I have to live." (laughs)

It's all right for a person to be able to go ahead and to do some work to survive, commercially or not, like I used to do.

S: Yes, you said you did posters, signs, window displays.

Y: There's nothing there to be ashamed about. It's honest work regardless of what it is. If you want to go ahead and work as a shoeshine boy or a store clerk, what difference does it make? You have to perform your art in a certain way so that you can survive. The thing that is most important is that you are able to survive, to live, to have energy. That is important. If you do not have the food and the kind of energy, you will not be able to create. I think that's very important. An artist needs to eat as well as any other human being. I think it's the wrong kind of attitude that some people think, "Well, artists have got to starve." They cannot starve to death. They must create canvasses.

S: They can't do very good work if they're starving.

Y: Exactly. They can't even hold themselves upright. They cannot create because their minds cannot function. I do not mean that the artist should have lots of money to survive, but at least some funds to keep themselves going.

S: No matter what profession you're in, when you're starting out, you have to do whatever it takes to survive until you become established.

Y: Of course. All young artists, everyone, needs that kind of beginning. They need to do that to understand what it's like. It's good to be dedicated and say to myself, "I'm not going to do anything else but this type of work," but, unfortunately, when you're young and you're just beginning, the support is not there. It would be fine if you had someone who said, "Oh yes, my friend John, you can go ahead and do whatever you want. You have a certain sum of money coming to you."

But, unfortunately, that's not very good either because you rely on another person to support you financially, and that way it's good in one sense, but in another way it's not too good because you may get too much support, too much money, and again you may not be able to do the things you want to do because you're spoiled. You lose a sense of creativity.

S: Or you'd feel indebted.

Y: Not only indebted. Just like I say to you, "You go ahead and paint so many pictures a year and I'll give you so much money." That's quite all right in some measure that the artist can do what he wants to do, but he has to make up so many paintings. In other words, he's being commissioned by a supporter. They say, "You have a certain amount of money, (just enough though, not too much) a year and then you will support yourself and you will paint for me a certain number of paintings." (laughs) Well, I didn't get that kind of support. Some artists have support like that where a person believes in their work and will finance them year after year.

S: But that seems to entail a production quota. If it could be without strings...

Y: I know, but it doesn't work that way. When a person gives a certain sum of money expecting you to paint twenty pictures a year, you're obliged to paint twenty pictures and in the long run the person who finances the situation will benefit because the painter will be painting for so little money.

S: Right, and as they say, we all have to have that struggle as part of our growth.

Y: Yes, it's an honest way of surviving and living and I think it makes you a stronger painter, too, to know what it's like to be a painter in the early years. You certainly don't want to come to the position where you starve so much you can't even work.

S: I think that over the years you've used just about every media.

Y: Yes, I've worked in all different media. I think every artist likes to work and experiment with different media because each media has something to offer. When you work in wood block printing, it's one media where you actually work on wood or linoleum or other material to create in a print. It's not like painting, but it's a kind of imagination where you cut into the wood or linoleum. It's entirely different exposure to your art. It's an entirely different expression.

The line, when you cut into the wood, has certain expression, a hard line or a very fine line, a thin line. Just as painting must have some verve. Working with wood is not the same as working with a brush. Then again, there's a difference when you work with monotype. It's different, too, because you work on a surface that is smooth. You work with inks and then you go through a press. You make a print because it's a monotype. And that kind of monotype, the print itself, is entirely different from painting oils. There's a certain kind of texture that you cannot get with a paintbrush because of the pull of the ink. That way you are creating another media that is so different from watercolor or oils or pastels.

So each has its own way; lithography, etching, mezzo tint and aquatint, silk screening, linotypes, woodcuts, painting in acrylics, watercolors or oils or even in enamel.

S: After all these years and all these various media, do you have a favorite?

Y: Yes, I work mostly in oils. That is my favorite. I work a lot with it simply because I'm more familiar with it after all these years of painting. I've been using oils. Watercolor has a certain feeling that is quite good, too, a fluid transparency, quite different from oils. It has something that I also like. But you asked me one thing. I prefer to work in oils more than any other media.

S: Tell me about this last trip you took. You were looking forward to it. Did you make some new discoveries?

Y: It's one trip after another. It's not quite the same. I always look forward to every trip. Nobody knows. It's an adventure. You have no idea what the trip's going to hold for you. I was planning to go to Europe this year and didn't go because of the situation with terrorism.

I decided to go in the other direction to Australia, to Bali, Singapore, Hong Kong and Taipei. Taipei I hadn't been to for a long, long time and the same way with Singapore. I

look forward to Bali. I've been there about seven times and each time it's not the same. There's something more to be discovered. It's a wonderful place to relax and do a lot of creative work.

S: You go with your canvasses?

Y: No, not on the short trips. Sketch pad. Canvasses are too difficult to carry.

S: In years gone by you used to take the canvasses.

Y: Oh, that was when I spent a whole year in Paris or a whole year in Hong Kong. Short trips you couldn't possibly do that because first of all, the paint would never dry. I like to take quick impressions of the areas where I've visited and then sometimes come back and work on them. Enlarge them. Work on oils in the studio.

It refreshes your mind. It's just like a diary anyway. Instead of using photographic equipment, you bring your paint brushes and you make notes and sketches. I'd rather do that than take a picture. (laughs)

S: Of course. Any collecting this time?

Y: Oh, yes. Collecting has been something again. I do not go particularly to one area to collect. Sometimes when a piece of art comes up and you see it, it's exciting and you start collecting it. I go purposely just to sketch and relax and find things. Discover things. Collecting is, again, not necessarily...I don't specifically go for that purpose.

Oftentimes it works that way. It's just a matter of happening. When you expect too much, it never comes. When you say, "I'm going to look for this," you will never find it. With the least expectation, the piece will turn up and here it is and you were fortunate to be there at the right time. (laughs)

Nobody knows. How do you know what they're going to have to offer to you? When you go one day, they may have nothing. Absolutely nothing. Nothing important. Other times when you go there, they've just got a shipment of so many things. That's what happened the last time. I found some wonderful Neolithic pottery that came from China, nearly 4,000 years old. Han pieces that I also found, and that has been something that I've been looking for for so many years and never was able to find them. Imagine, about fifty years of looking and finally they turn up this year. (laughs) Marvelous pieces of art. For me, it's an extension of my creativity to discover art and enjoy them and to have the means to buy them for my personal collection.

S: You mentioned some of the artists that you'd been friends with during the forties and fifties.

Y: Even earlier than that.

S: Those were your fellow artists, but what about any teachers or influences earlier than that?

Y: Well, when you start out as a young artist, you go to museums, you look at all the art with admiration and study them. You begin to work realistically. Sometimes the Academy would have a show coming in from the United States, a travelling exhibition, and you would go to those and get inspired by some of the works and the artists. What inspired me most in the later years were the French Impressionists. That gave me much more of a desire to go to Paris and see the Louvre for the first time. Seeing the paintings done by the Old Masters.

S: I get the feeling though that you were receptive to all of it. I don't think there was one particular school or artist.

Y: No. As you can see, I was receptive to everything, Chinese art, Chinese painting, Chinese collecting of art.

S: And, of course, Mexican.

Y: I cannot pinpoint...Pre-Columbian art inspired Tamayo who worked in that field when he was a young man. He worked in a museum and he did a lot of drawings of the pre-Columbian art. For me, I enjoy pre-Columbian art, I enjoy African primitive, Chinese, the paintings, the Impressionists. What can I say? I think the most important part is to be able to assimiliate all these things, all the cultures, their art, the various sculpture forms and put it into one, and I absorb all this after all these years.

When you get back home, there's a moment when you think back what you have seen, and it more or less gets into your system and when you start painting, who knows the things that came out of that experience?

S: You absorb it and there's a synthesis.

Y: Oh, sure. You've seen all different shows, you've seen beautiful exhibitions all over the world, wonderful exhibitions of the French Impressionists, great exhibitions of modern art, contemporary. How can one pinpoint? I'm going to be like him or I want to be like him. You can't be, anyway, and I do not want to be. I would like to absorb what has been expressed by another artist, but what's important is that I want to establish my own kind of thing for myself. Not necessarily trying to be like the other artists and doing

what they are doing. In that case, I am not growing. I'm just doing what has been done before.

Your mind's expanding. Your eyes have seen so much. You absorb so much. It's inside of you. You can't pinpoint, well, I'm going to paint like this guy Degas, or I'm going to paint like Picasso or Monet. It's most important that an artist should go ahead and see all these paintings, absorb them, enjoy them for what they are and then when you have them all in your system, you begin to explore for yourself. Just for your own satisfaction. Maybe something entirely different that's particularly John Young.

S: You've had a fantastically interesting career with the combination of travelling and collecting.

Y: Well, it's been a tough and hard career. I told you in the first interview how rough it is being an artist when you start off with nothing, with only the ambition and enthusiasm and you work at it, right? There were times of hardship when there's no money to support yourself, no money to buy even supplies. That's again where one has to do odd jobs to make enough money to buy supplies and to be able to support yourself. That's important. I don't believe an artist should get financial aid from other people. They should work out their own problems. If they're persistent, it'll work out.

S: With a couple of breaks along the line. (laughs)

Y: The breaks will come. I think everyone has a break if they'll only wait and accept it. I think every artist has a break.

S: You also described yourself as basically self-taught, because you just had certain basic courses at McKinley.

Y: The basic courses were just like drawing, line drawing, draftsmanship, pencil drawings, charcoal. That's about all we did at that time. Of course, today the schools have a different program.

S: That's what I wanted to ask you about young artists today. Do you think they could use the same approach that you did or is everything so structured now that they have to go to art school?

Y: They don't have to go to art school. Why should they go to art school? Not every artist can afford to go to, let's say, New York Art School. Nor can they go to Yale or Harvard art school. Many, many artists go to schools for visual arts, yes. And graphic arts. Fine. To make a living. But for an artist to go away to study, it's fine if they can do it. I'm for that because if every artist can go away to

Paris and work there for themselves, they don't have to study.

They get the wonderful inspiration of what has been done, all the people working there, the camaraderie with other artists. I think they can learn by themselves and other artists just like we did in the early years when artists got together by themselves and talked. I don't think it's necessary that an artist should go to school. They can work it out themselves.

S: There's nothing like travelling.

Y: I think it's a wonderful thing. I think every young artist if they have the opportunity, should take that opportunity and see, just look and see, work there if they can. And come home with the excitement and wonderful ideas. Then again, if a person cannot make a trip, they should not be discouraged either, because you can find it just as exciting working here in your own hometown.

S: And this would be a particularly good hometown, I would think.

Y: This community does support its artists, but again it all depends on the artists and how they approach the subject. Whether they want to be an artist or not.

S: I was thinking in terms of the sheer physical beauty and the variety in Hawaii for an artist.

Y: Well, artists say that Honolulu is too beautiful. They can't paint. The mountains, the landscapes and everything is so beautiful. The sky is so blue, the ocean is so blue. It doesn't seem conducive to work because the environment is too pleasant. (laughs)

One of the wonderful experiences for me was to go to Paris in 1959 and to be able to find myself an atelier, a studio, where I could work there for any length of time. I had a little studio. It was given to me for half a day from twelve o'clock to five in the afternoon. At that time we paid a dollar (laughs) for the use of the studio. We got some coal to keep us warm and that was a time when you could feel like you're right in this beautiful studio, an old studio with a skylight, wonderful atmosphere, and nothing to do but just sit there. This is all yours, you can have all the canvasses you want, the paint's right there and you can start painting away, creating, without any worries. You sit there for five hours and you keep on painting and painting and you're tired out by standing. You almost come to a point of exhaustion by the end of the day. But what wonderful exhaustion because you look back at your paintings and you say, "This is what I've done today."

There were moments, of course, of disappointment. There were moments of frustration because not all canvasses turn out the way you want them. Other times you find out, "Gosh, what did I do? That doesn't seem right." And, of course, you just, in a burst of frustration, mar it all up and start all over again tomorrow. Can't stand it! These are the tribulations of an artist.

S: Did you ever reach that point of total frustration, like we see always in the movies, where the artist just slashes away at the canvass?

Y: Oh, sure. (laughter) Throw the damn thing away. Forget the whole thing. I don't want to look at it. Can't stand it. I get to the point, "Did I do this?" Take the paper, tear it all up, throw away the pieces.

Some friends of mine would be there and say, "What did you do that for? Why don't you give it to me? Why did you tear it up?" "Because it's not good. If it's not good, I don't want to keep it and no one should have it." Those are the times, you know. It's not that simple being a painter, it's not always glory. There are times of frustration, times when you don't do it right. "What did I do? What's wrong with me? I can't do it." And you begin to wonder.

S: But you wouldn't have chosen any other life, I bet.

Y: No. This life has been good for me. It's been most creative. When a person creates, regardless of what it is, being a painter, a writer, or the performing arts, a dancer, I think it's so wonderful to be able to express yourself. What could be more wonderful than to be able to create something that you truly enjoy doing and the end result, you find out that, "Well, I like what I did."

It's just the idea of painting. This is what I want to paint. I don't care if nobody wants it, it doesn't matter at all. At the time you start painting, you just start painting away. You're not thinking in terms of this is going to bring so many dollars because then again it's too commercial. You can never create a painting when you have that kind of inside feelings. You have to feel when you paint to let yourself go emotionally and physically, too. You're doing something for youself to satisfy you.

S: Tell me some more about some of your trips.

Y: Well, there was the time I was in Barcelona and I was interested in collecting art, of course, at that time. I was told that this old gentleman has a collection of art, and sure enough I met this old gentleman. A Spaniard. That's why it's good to collect art. You meet a lot of interesting

collectors and friends. We talk art in general and then he had some wonderful things. Things that I'd been searching for like Coptic textiles. They were interesting pieces of works of arts. He had a collection of those, and also a beautiful Cristo in bronze, twelfth century, which I did buy.

There was one beautiful cross complete. It was so beautiful. It was a toss. If I buy that, I won't have the money to continue on with my trip. (laughs) There was no other choice. I'd rather go ahead and complete the trip. To this day I've wondered to myself, "Why didn't I buy it and forget about the trip?" I do not regret that so much. The next time around, fifteen or twenty years later, I said, "I'm going to go back and search for that piece again. That complete cross. Cristo. About twelfth century."

I went from one gallery to another. All countries. From France to England to Switzerland, Austria, Germany, Spain, everywhere. They all said, "You must be out of your mind. There's no such thing anymore. A needle in a haystack to have a twelfth century Cristo complete with cross. No, you couldn't find anything like that. You may be able to find seventeenth or eighteenth century, but not twelfth."

Anyway, I kept searching and finally got to a position where I thought, "Well, I guess not. Maybe I won't be able to find this Cristo."

S: But you knew that one existed though.

Y: I don't know. Somewheres. The final part was I gave up, almost. I thought I probably couldn't find it. My last stop was in Portugal. I went to an antique shop there and I saw some interesting sculpture. Spanish art, the mother, madonna and child. Probably seventeenth or eighteenth century. Kind of big. Looked pretty good. I finally said, "They're kind of too big. I couldn't take things that size. Do you have anything smaller?"

He opened up a drawer in his desk and, lo and behold, a twelfth century cross was right in the drawer. (laughs) I said to myself, "Of all the countries, all the time and effort, and here it is in the drawer." I never showed that enthusiasm. I didn't talk about that one. I didn't want to let him know my anxiety. I said, "What about this piece over here from Spain." "Well, that one there is so many dollars." "What about that one there?" We didn't come to the one that I wanted yet. "So much." "Well, what about this thing here? Where's it from?" (laughter) I said, "How much is that?" "Oh, that is very little money." I was surprised. I said, "Gosh, how much?" "Well," he said, "a thousand dollars." "A thousand dollars." I didn't let him know my anxiety. I want it. So I played it cool. I said, "Look, I'll buy it. Will

you accept my personal check?" "I'm sorry, we don't accept any personal checks." "Well, all right. How about Visa Card, American Express?" "No, we don't take Express either." He leaves you hanging loose at that point. He won't take your check; he won't take American Express. "Well, what then?" "We want cash." I said, "In that case then, how about giving you half cash and half by check or Visa card?" He said, "I'm sorry, we can't do that for a thousand dollars." "I see. All right. I'll come back tomorrow morning and bring you the money and pick it up." I left word with him, "I'll buy it. I'm coming back tomorrow morning and let you have the money and do this transaction. All right."

The sad part is this. I had a thousand dollars in my pocket which means I could have given him the thousand dollars and walked off with the piece. But I just didn't want to show my anxiety that much. I didn't want to say, "Here's a thousand dollars right here," and plunk it right down and walk off with it, which I could have done. All right. The next morning sure enough he opened the door and he said, "Triste." You know what "triste" means? Sorry, sad. I said, "What's wrong?" "We just sold that piece." But he didn't sell it. Probably discovered he didn't want to sell the piece. Wrongly quoted, maybe. That was a fantastic story. I could have bought that piece and taken it home, right?

S: So you never got one.

Y: I never got one. (laughs) But those are the situations. Which means that the next time you find something that you truly like and you've got the money, you buy it and you close the deal. I did that also when I was in Amsterdam. I had bought some nice pieces, African art pieces, and there was another piece he showed me. This was very handsome with the head turned like that. It's quite rare. I said, "I like that piece very much." I could have bought it, but I said, "I'll come back in the morning and make the transaction." I came back in the morning and he said, "Oh, we just sold that piece after you left." (laughs)

S: You think that the fellow figured out he had something really good there?

Y: Oh sure. He made an error. Maybe he called the owner and said, "You must be crazy. That thing is worth ten thousand, ten times." That's a wonderful experience meeting people like that and making transactions. There were other times that were just as exciting.

S: The perils of collecting.

Y: Well, I'm not regretting. My philosophy is that if you've missed something that you really, truly want, there are others that you can have in the future. Don't be too sad that you lost it. It's all right. That's the philosophy one should take.

S: You have to.

Y: Just like when you get married and it doesn't work out and you have a divorce. (laughs)

S: It all comes with living.

Y: Living, it's true. Living is quite exciting.

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Y: I did tell you about my shows. One led to another. The times when paintings were selected from Hawaii for shows on the mainland called Art USA in New York City at the Metropolitan.

S: I don't think we talked about that. We talked about the exhibits, but primarily the West Coast.

Y: Yes, this one over here was Art Heritage, Art USA. It was exciting to be selected, to be chosen from Hawaii. Only three painters were selected at that time; Reuben Tam, Madge Tennent and myself. They were shown at the Metropolitan and at the Corcoran Art Museum, and travelling shows to Germany and all through the United States. Cross-Current they called it. We were chosen also. Competition throughout the United States. We were given a chance to compete for showing. They selected from every state, maybe two or three artists. Representing Hawaii one or two, Washington two or three, like that, you know. Then they combine all the paintings into a group that's shown all over the United States museums and finally ended up in Germany, then returned.

S: That was a lot of national exposure. Have you had much international?

Y: The international exposure was Germany. I guess that's it. Paris, I've shown once in a while. My kind of exhibition has never extended itself because I've never had an agent. I've worked on my own. Being in Honolulu, which is a small city, we do not have that kind of exposure unless you have an agent who handles your things on the mainland, like a big gallery.

S: Did you ever consider moving to the mainland for that kind of exposure?

Y: No. As you can see, I've worked here for all these years simply because I feel that this is my home. I can do the things I want to do. Perhaps if I had gone to New York City, I'd be a little different. If I had gone to Paris, I might be more known internationally.

It's just a question of how I liked, where I want to work. It's a personal kind of thing. I just can't say that I should have done this, I should have done that. I'm not regetting one bit what I've done. I'm pretty happy with what I've done here in the Islands and shown in different places and accepted by people in different areas. I think it's fine.

S: It's a priority thing within yourself.

Y: When you do go away and come back home, you lose all the years that you could have been enjoying Hawaii. There's no two ways about it. You either make yourself a reputation maybe in Paris or a reputation in New York and so what? It's not bad at all, I think. It's not the reputation really that I'm seeking. I think more important is my self-respect, what I truly want to do.

S: It's self-satisfaction and contentment combined with fulfillment.

Y: Right. That's the ultimate of everything else, isn't it? That's what life is all about anyway.

S: You mentioned about the artists not being able to work here because it's so beautiful. I think you overcame that. (laughs)

Do you plan ahead along particular themes that you want to do or a particular series that you want to do?

Y: Well, some artists have themes. They work on a whole series of themes. Oftentimes, I think maybe a theme of just the sea. I've done some, but then most exhibitions have not been that way. The whole exhibition represents all different things that I have done or witnessed or experienced. Not necessarily a theme of just doing one thing or just doing a theme on Venice alone or just Hawaiian seascapes. Although I've done a lot of those, which could have been an exhibition, Along the Sea or something like that. I've not done it yet. Maybe some day I will. Probably have an exhibition of only the sea.

I've gone through a lot of different times and different subject matter. When I get up in the morning, I get the

canvass ready and I sit it on that easel and then I start working. And what comes out, "This is what I want to do." Shall I paint the sea or do I want to do an abstract painting? Whatever you want to do. You have to decide. If it's an abstract painting, you put the paint on the easel and let yourself go. The color scheme that you want to work with. Keep on exploring. Keep on working. Who knows? All of a sudden a new burst of color may come through or something very subtle. A new canvass is actually a new, exciting day. No two canvasses are alike. Each time you attack the canvass, you are yourself. What you become on the canvass, you discover that you never discovered before. That's the part that's exciting. Not just painting a subject and doing it that way. What's interesting in painting when you do this, is to see something emerging from the canvass. Every day is different. No two canvasses are the same.

S: Each day's exciting.

Y: It's not like going to the office and doing bookkeeping, every day the same routine. Painting is not routine. It's a form of art that's so creative that you know you have a burst of energy, of vitality, that you never know yourself.

S: I get the feeling in talking to artists that they have boundless energy. Maybe that isn't necessarily true, but they seem to exude this enthusiasm and energy.

Y: Sometimes you get so enthusiastic you can't drop the brush. Even in the dark, I can hardly see, I cannot see the canvass, wishing there were more light, this artificial light is not the same. You cannot wait until morning breaks.

For me it's not like anything else. The studio is large and you have space to walk around and look at the paintings. Every day is challenging.

S: Did your parents live long enough to see you achieve a certain amount of success?

Y: Yes, yes. They came to my exhibitions at the Academy and one-man shows. God, they were pleased. My mother, as I told you, was the one that more or less encouraged me. My father thought that I should be a bookkeeper. You know, the old Chinese ways of life. You cannot be a painter and try to make a living. It's tough.

S: That's what we said. They wanted you to be practical. They worry about security. It's good that they lived long enough to see you achieve success.

Y: It's been wonderful years for me. I must admit that I have made numerous friends and they've been most helpful and in many ways encouraging in the early years. I think every

artist needs that encouragement when he's starting off. I've always believed that an artist should be given all the support there is. If there's a chance to support them, either encouragement in words or finances, whatever. Most important is to buy the paintings. You don't have to give them anything. Just say, "I like your work. I'm buying it." How wonderful it is! "He likes my work and he's buying my painting."

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SUBJECT INDEX

THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Watumull Foundation Oral History Project began in June of 1971. During the following seventeen months eighty-eight people were taped. These tapes were transcribed but had not been put in final form when the project was suspended at the end of 1972.

In 1979 the project was reactivated and the long process of proofing, final typing and binding began. On the fortieth anniversary of the Watumull Foundation in 1982 the completed histories were delivered to the three repositories.

As the value of these interviews was realized, it was decided to add to the collection. In November of 1985 Alice Sinesky was engaged to interview and edit thirty-three histories that have been recorded to mark the forty-fifth anniversary of the Foundation.

The subjects for the interviews are chosen from all walks of life and are people who are part of and have contributed to the history of Hawaii.

The final transcripts, on acid-free Permalife bond paper and individually Velo-bound, are deposited and are available to scholars and historians at the Hawaii State Archives, the Hamilton Library at the University of Hawaii and the Cooke Library at Punahou School. The tapes are sealed and are not available.

August 1987